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ABSTRACT

The language-across-the-curriculum (LAC) movement in Britain began in the 1960s with a few secondary school experiments, from which developed more coordinated attempts to lower interdisciplinary barriers. This movement was characterized by emphasis on the language-learning link, the crucial role of discussion in the learning process, and the democratization of instruction. By the mid-1970s, there was general agreement on the following points: (1) subject teachers should communicate more among themselves because of their common interest in the role of language in learning; (2) policy for LAC should be developed as a more general learning policy; (3) learning involves not only language and content, but also study skills; and (4) LAC is a common responsibility of all disciplines, not just English departments. A major obstacle in establishing a common language policy has been the traditional subject-based curriculum. LAC proponents might be more successful if they were to convince teachers of the importance of language in their individual disciplines and then integrate content among disciplines. This is also true for situations in which English is taught as a second language, where English teachers can help by using school subjects as the content of English lessons. (MSE)

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RELC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM 22-26 APRIL 1985

JOHN GREENWOOD : THE CASE FOR CONTENT ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AS WELL AS LANGUAGE.

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A. Preliminary Remarks

I would like to make three points about the chosen topic for the Seminar. First of all, although I am myself mainly concerned with English as the target language, I realise that RELC stands for Regional Language Centre, and not just English language. Secondly, I hold that for educational purposes the learner's mother tongue should be used for as long as possible. My third point is that language and reading are not synonymous; that is, although reading is a major aspect of using language for educational purposes (e.g. the language of textbooks), language is a much wider term.

B. The British Situation

In March, 1981 the Department of Education and Science published a document called "The School Curriculum". It was a very general statement reflecting official views. Here are two quotations:-

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> "The Secretaries of State recognise that the curriculum can be described and analysed in several ways...They have thought it most helpful to express much of their guidance in terms of subjects, because secondary school timetables are almost always devised in subject terms... In analysing the curriculum, however, other frames of reference are also required. These may be in terms of the skills required at particular stages of a pupil's career..." (para 19)
>
> "...language is part of the means of learning in all subjects, so that English is a necessary concern of all teachers and there needs to be an organised policy for English across the curriculum..." (para 44)

As is well known, rarely does an official statement initiate new ideas or behaviour. Rather, it will reflect the received attitudes and practices of workers in the field, created by much previous hard work. This 81 statement had over ten years' experience behind it. In my paper I want to consider the what and the why of this "Language across

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the Curriculum" movement (henceforth LAC)in Britain,in the hope that such an exercise may be useful and informative in our present deliberations on LAC in the S.E.Asia context.

The LAC movement began in the 60s with a few experiments in certain secondary schools,e.g.Henbury School,Bristol[1] in 1963 and Norwood School,London[2] in 1964. From these isolated instances developed more co-ordinated and shared attempts at breaking down the subject barriers through,for example,team-teaching in an inter-disciplinary curriculum. Excellent work was done by the London Association of Teachers of English (LATE) by the early 70s;and the Barnes,Britton and Rosen book[3] had an enormous influence,as did the Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching that produced the Language in Use material.[4]

From all this stimulating activity I want to highlight three important tenets held by those associated with the LAC work:-

i) the language - learning link

> "...children's experience in some subjects has been significantly improved because conscious consideration has been given to language..."[5]

ii)the crucial role of discussion as part of the learning process

> "...we wanted them to talk a lot...We wanted to preserve their confidence and willingness to talk freely...The programme is geared to provide opportunity to talk."[6]

iii)the democratisation of education

> "Thus acceptance of the need for expressive language implies a shift to a more equal distribution of power between teacher and taught,and places new demands on the teacher...the programme is democratic and optimistic in its assertion of the possibility of educational achievement by the majority of children."[7]

> "The fact that we were <u>all</u> in a learning situation and the liberation this gives. I remember a startling feeling of sanity when I said in answer to a child's question about local government,'I don't know,but Mrs Ferguson is in Room 7. Go and ask her and then come and tell me.'..."[8]

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Implications for us here at the Seminar may be rather disturbing, even if culturally possible. Do we want our school-learners to be given more opportunity to talk themselves, or do we wish to maintain the teacher-talk dominance? Also, the popular ELT use of worksheets tends to go against discussion. How do we reconcile a more democratic attitude with the need to keep discipline with large classes and the traditional role of the teacher as the person in authority?

In 1975 the Bullock Report[9] gave official approval to much of the preceding ten years' work that I have outlined. Although only six pages are specifically on LAC, the concept pervades the whole Report. Insistence on the centrality of language in the learning process has two aspects:-

i) A learner has to cope with the language of the subject (e.g. Geography) through which the content is expressed. Learning difficulties may be caused by not understanding the language used, rather than the subject concepts themselves. Even Maths with its own language of numerical symbols needs natural language. "Attending to the language of a subject is one way of attending to the subject."[10] For example, in a study[11] of the language of Chemistry only one in twenty pupils could use correctly/more than half the words taken from Chemistry texts and exams, e.g. pungeant, justify, attributed, dense, concept, residue, converse, constituent. By changing "a non-aqueous solvent" to "a liquid other than water", there was an increase of 15% in correct answers. Thus <u>all</u> teachers are teachers of language. Learning to communicate is central to the educational process; and we communicate mainly through language.

Here are two contrasting extracts[12] from textbooks which illustrate how language can help or hinder the school learner to understand the subject:-

"The map here shows part of the Severn Valley. The map is broken up into 9 squares. Now find the village of Uckington. Did you find it right away? Or did you have to look all over the map for it? You'd certainly have found it quicker if we had told you it was in the first square of the bottom row."

and

"Figures need special attention as they form an important integral part of a drawing; be careful notto make them too large. Projectors drawn from a projection should pass beyond the arrows of a dimension line,and not connect to a projection outline."

The first extract is from a Maths book and there is a very deliberate attempt to use a level of informal language suitable to the learners. In the second extract (first page of a Metalwork book) no such attenpt is made.The reader will have no difficulty in supplying other examples.

ii) However,the school learner has to cope with the language of up to ten different subjects on the curriculum -- not to mention the ten idiolects of the ten teachers. On the one hand,there is the language specific to the school subject,especially in vocabulary: Bunsen burner,pipette in Physics; plant,chrysalis in Biology,etc.(Note the predominance of nouns in subject-specific lexis) At the same time, there is a language shared by all or most subjects,e.g.development, growth,rise,examine,relations,etc. All school subjects deal with similar uses of language,i.e. to describe,to compare,to classify.This is the language of academic study,the "language across the curriculum".

All very familiar to us in the ELT world through our experience of ESP(particularly EAP),the work of Halliday,Wilkins,Widdowson and many others.What is interesting to note is this parallel movement in the EL1 context in Britain; and,as you know,parallel lines do not usually meet,alas.

By the mid-70s there was consensus in the LAC world which was by and large expressed in the Bullock Report. There was general agreement on the following:-

a. It would be sensible for subject teachers to liaise in a school, since they share a common factor: language for learning/teaching. Some agreed language policy is needed in a school.

b. Since language is not only the medium of instruction but also an integral part of the learning process itself, it is not just a language policy but a more general learning policy that needs to be established. As Harland says:

> "The aim of a LAC policy is ...to create a virtuous circle: if a school devotes thought and time to assisting language development, learning in all areas will be helped; if attention is given to language in the content and skill subjects, language development will be assisted powerfully by the context and purpose of those subjects." [3]

c. Learning involves not just subject content and language but also study skills, as it is crucial to identify the learners' needs in the learning process. (We are again on familiar ground. It would seem that LAC has many affinities to ESP at tertiary level and English-as-the-medium at secondary level.)

d. As all teachers are involved, LAC is <u>not</u> the sole responsibility of the English department in a school. It must not be seen as empire-building, but as a common responsibility.

A major obstacle to establishing a common language policy has been the traditional subject-based curriculum. Subjects tend to be taught in splendid isolation. Many teachers resist co-operation and interdisciplinary work, though there have been some notable exceptions. This attitude is not to be dismissed as purely negative or wrong-headed. It must be respected as professionally tenable: "the geographers were concerned that children should perceive patterns in the interaction of man with his environment. The historians were interested in developing awareness of how man relates himself to particular circumstances in the past, while the R.E. teachers were concerned to promote an awareness of how man answers questions about Meaning." [4] Perhaps it would be better first to convince subject teachers of the importance of language for their own subject, then develop links with other teachers who have them-

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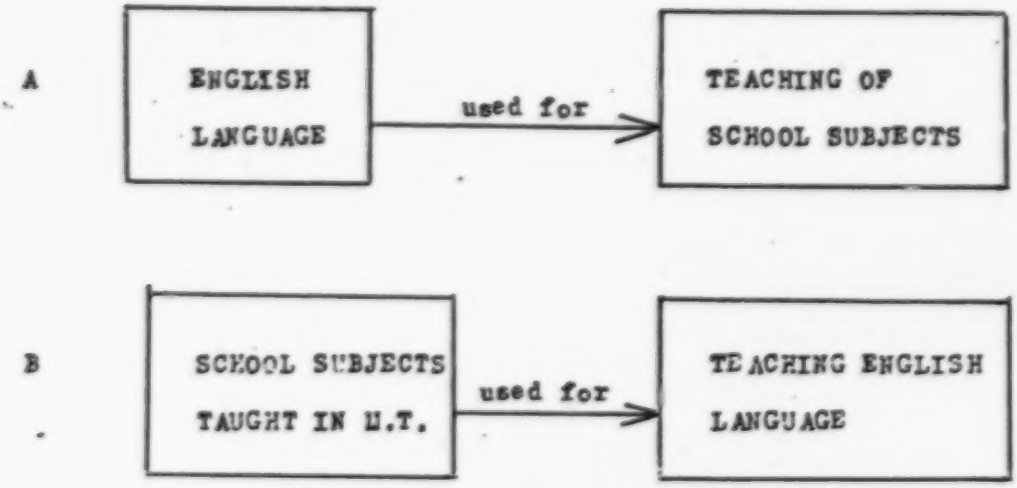
C ELT Situations.

It seems to me that this "first step" is also applicable to the EL2 situation where the teacher of English has a vital role to play in bringing together the three aspects: school subjects, LAC and study skills. It can be of mutual benefit to the teaching of both English as a foreign language and the other school subjects.

I have already referred to ESP and EMI where a second or foreign language is used. What is also worth encouraging (perhaps as a learning phase prior to ESP and EMI) is the reverse, i.e. the use of school subjects as the content of English lessons. The difference could be diagrammatically expressed thus:-

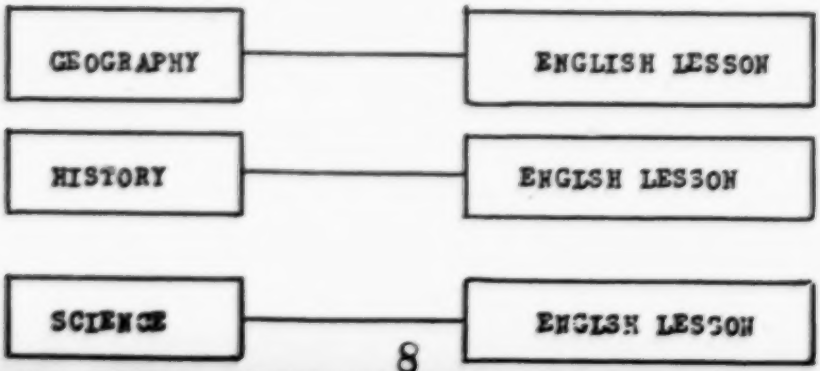


This second situation has been given recent prominence by Widdowson[11], but it was advocated and practised long before it received the Widdowson imprimatur. In 1965 Peter Strevens wrote:

> "...many pupils would much prefer to have their English practice in the field of geography or science rather than go on being subjected to bowdlerised versions of the more faded flowers of British literary mythology... a simple explanation of a jet engine, or the effects of constructing a very large dam, or a brief description of space navigation, are more likely to keep the customers interested."[12]

A word of warning must be given. Advocates(many of whom are native-speakers of English)do not always realise the difficulties arising from an inadequate command of English by the teachers who will have to use the content of other subjects in English lessons. Much has been written about the inadequate level of English of the subject teachers using English as a medium; and the Singapore Conversion Course for Geography and History teachers is a recent attempt to deal with this problem. However,we must be wary of taking for granted the ability of teachers of English to cope with the language - as well as the concepts - of Geography,Maths,etc. This is one of the items being researched at the moment by a Ph.D.student[18] of mine who is trying out teaching units using as content Geography, History,Science,Maths,Sport and Religion in Israeli schools. How acceptable to the average non-native-speaker teacher is this content? Are we demanding too much? We are all familiar with the typical,and often boastful,reaction to conceptual difficulties ("I'm hopeless at Maths"),but I suspect many a teacher is ashamed to admit difficulties with the language. After all,their professional competence is at stake.[19] Furthermore,does the English teacher restrict the content to known matter,or does s/he introduce new content?

In conclusion I would like to plead for an integration of the subject content across the curriculum,e.g.History,Geography and Science as a unifying input to the English lessons,rather than linking the subjects separately.[20] Diagrammatically,instead of



I would prefer

In my workshop session I will examine in detail two experiments (one in Italy, the other in Israel) which use content from other subjects. I will be looking at some of the aspects I've raised in this paper, e.g. how much talk by learners, how much the subjects have in common in form and use of language, how appropriate the level of linguistic difficulty for the learners, the degree of new content introduced, and the amount of subject integration.

Th. Greenwood.

NOTES

1 For details, see Booley, M(75): "English within a Humanities Interdisciplinary Curriculum" in English in Education Vol 9/2.

2 For details, see Tucker, M(67): "Curriculum Experiments at Norwood School, London - 1964/66" in English in Education Vol 2/1.

3 Barnes, D., Britton, J. and Rosen, H.(69): Language, the Learner and the School (Penguin)

4 I have mentioned only a few names in this paragraph. One could add many more, e.g.
Flower(66): Language and Education
Whitehead(66): The Disappearing Dais
Dixon(67): Growth through English
Halliday(74): Language and Social Man
etc etc

5. Medway, P.(81): "The Bible and the vernacular: the significance of language across the curriculum" in English in Education Vol 15/1.

6. Tucker,N.(67): "Curriculum Experiments at Norwood School,London - 1964/66" in English in Education Vol 2/1.
7. Medway,P.(81) op.cit.
8. Tucker,N.(67) op.cit.
9 A Language for Life (HMSO,1975)
10 Barnes et al,(69) op.cit.
11 Cassels,J.R.T.(80): "Language and Learning - a Chemist's View" in Teaching English Vol 14/1
12 Fox,C.(71): "Reading across the Curriculum - suggestions for a Study Group" in English in Education Vol 5/3.
13 Marland,M.(77): Language across the Curriculum,p.3.(Heinemann)
14 Booley,M.(75) op.cit.
15 For a detailed discussion,see Marland,M.(77) pp 93-94,99-101.
16 Widdowson,H.G.(78): Teaching Language as Communicationpp 15-18(OUP)
17 Strevens,P.(65): "The Teaching of other subjects in a foreign language" Paper delivered at the TESOL Conference,San Diego. In 67 the following appeared in Sierra Leone:-
"...the basic skills and attitudes which teachers try to develop in their pupils through a concentration on formal learning of English might more readily be acquired through other content areas."
- Awooner-Renner,M.(67): "Correlation of the aims of English Teaching and the teaching of Geography." in Sierra Leone Geography Journal Vol 1/11.
18 Mrs Iris Ceva,Haifa LEA,Israel.
19 It would be interesting and instructive to know what is happening in this respect on the Bangalore Project with its task-oriented syllabus. See my forthcoming article in the October,85 issue of English Language Teaching Journal.
20 For an excellent example round the topic of growth,see Luke,M.(71): "English in integrated studies:a Suggestion for Work" in English in Education Vol 5/1.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Jeanne / Bill Date: 11/4

From: Jodi Copy to:

Subject:

This is excellent and should definitely be in RIE. It's an excellent summary of the key issues, movement & gaps from theoretical / methodological overviews & recommendations.

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